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PAPERS FOR WAR TIME. No. 12

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An

Answer to Bernhardi

By

D. S. CAIRNS, D.D.

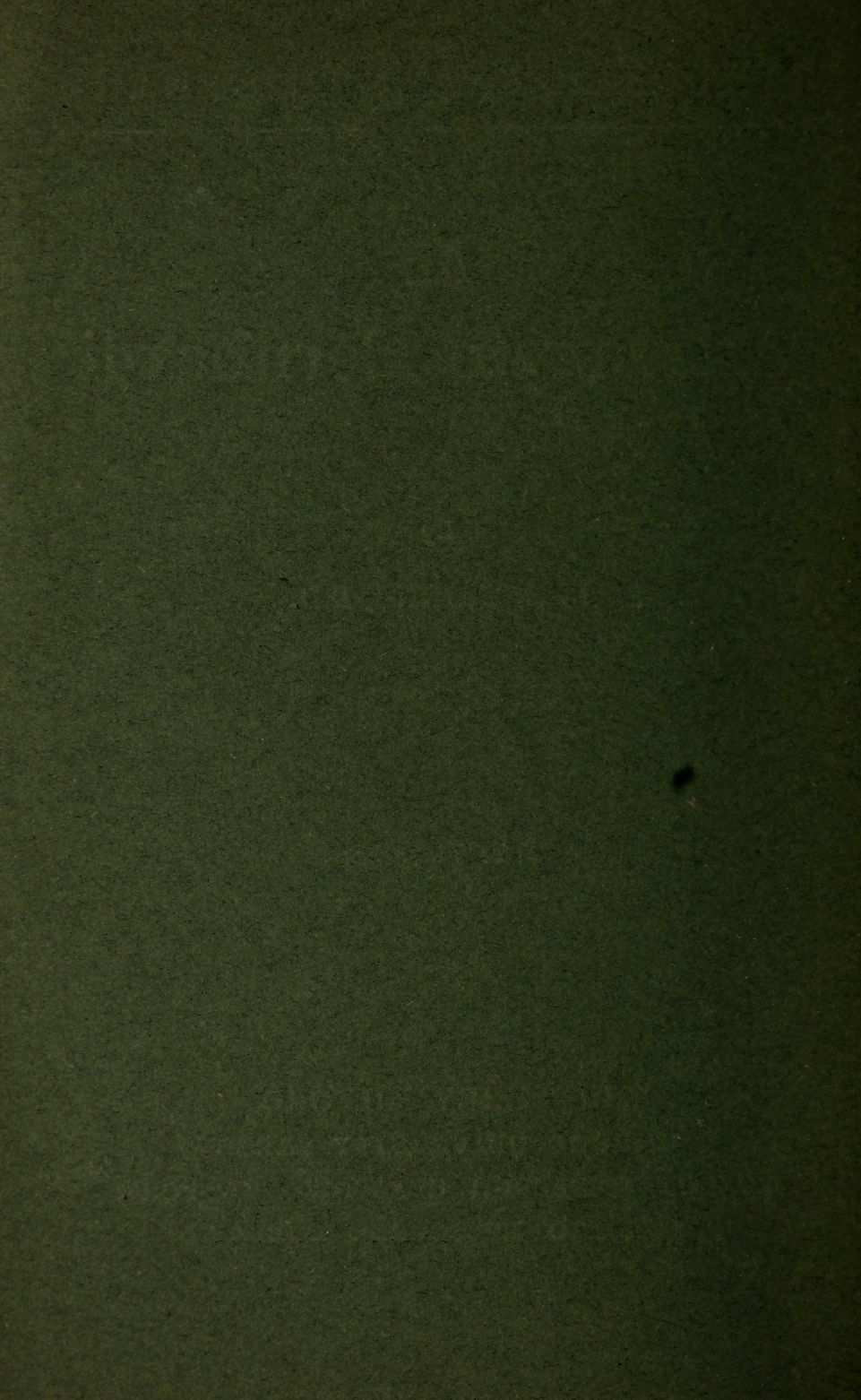
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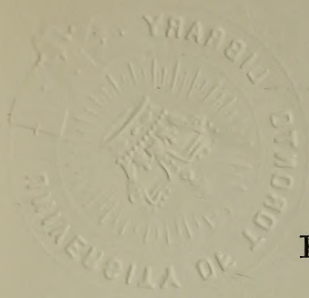
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EXPLANATORY NOTE

GREAT BRITAIN is engaged in a war from which, as we believe, there was offered to our nation no honourable way of escape. The desire of all who love their country is to serve it in the hour of its need, and so to live and labour that those who have fallen in its service may not have died in vain. While this may suffice to make immediate duty clear, the war remains in the deepest sense a challenge to Christian thought. The present bitter struggle between nations which for centuries have borne the Christian name indicates some deep-seated failure to understand the principles of Christ and to apply them to human affairs.

This series of papers embodies an attempt to reach, by common thought, discussion and prayer, a truer understanding of the meaning of Christianity and of the mission of the Church to the individual, to society and to the world.

Those who are promoting the issue of these papers are drawn from different political parties and different Christian bodies. They believe that the truth they seek can be attained only by providing for a measure of diversity in expression. Therefore they do not accept responsibility for the opinions of any paper taken alone. But in spirit they are united, for they are one in the conviction that in Christ and in His Gospel lies the hope of redemption and health for society and for national life.

AN ANSWER TO BERNHARDI

FEW names have been more frequently quoted among us of late than that of General von Bernhardi. His volume *Germany and the next War* is generally taken among us as an exposition of the inner mind of Germany. The writer of this tract can only say that after many years of acquaintance with religious and philanthropic circles in Germany, it is his belief that most of their leading minds are quite unacquainted with it, and that, if they were, they would repudiate its ideas with indignation. But it is unfortunately also true that it does represent the party in Germany which is now in the ascendant, so far as we can learn its mind from its press and its public actions, and that this party is heartily supported by the nation. For a full understanding of how this came to be, it is better to wait than to attempt premature explanation.

What is Bernhardi's central thought? It is that war is, and always will be, a necessity, and that it is our duty and wisdom to recognize this, and give it its due place and honour in all our thoughts.

Now the view that war is a necessity is unfortunately held by many good Christians and Idealists, but it is held with a difference. They believe that war is a consequence of human sin, and they tacitly assume that sin will always endure in God's world. But they hold that sin need not have been, and so they are able to condemn war, just as they condemn every form of evil. It is man's doing and not God's purpose.

Bernhardi is more logical and more uncompromising.

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He holds that war is not contingent upon what men may or may not wish to do ; that it is part of the ground-plan of the universe, and therefore part of God's purpose for men. Germany's true wisdom lies in recognizing this, and in not being foolishly squeamish about it. Her true teacher here is 'the incomparable Frederick', whose supreme glory it was to recognize the facts of the universe, who through that veracious recognition and masterful handling of the facts has made Prussia great, and who, if Germany will follow 'the Friederician tradition', will make Germany greater still. Hence she must organize herself more efficiently for war, to this end determine her economic, educational, and religious policy on more purely militarist lines, and so attain that actual hegemony of the world to which the superior quality of her civilization rightfully entitles her.

This is the central thought of the volume, and therefore the real answer to Bernhardi must start with his principle of the necessity and glory of war. We shall first of all examine this as Bernhardi puts it, then consider more briefly that view of its necessity which is less revolting to intellect and to conscience, and which is held by many Christians, and shall finally endeavour to indicate that fuller Christian view which is essential to any complete answer. What, then, are Bernhardi's reasons for believing that war is an eternal necessity of human life ? We must distinguish, to begin with, between his practical and his philosophical grounds.

THE INFLUENCE OF FREDERICK THE GREAT

His whole discussion of the matter leaves on the mind the impression that his convictions have been determined by considerations which are not philosophical. He is a *Junker* first and a philosopher second. 'The incomparable Frederick' and not Plato or Hegel is his real

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master. War has made Germany great, and more war will make her greater still ; this is the reiterated burden of the volume. When he passes from this sure and massive conviction to the philosophical and religious grounds for it he at once becomes wavering and self-contradictory. For himself he prefers an idealistic philosophy, but he is eager to show that any good and consistent materialist ought to hold the same conclusion. As for Christianity, is it not fundamentally a religion of combat, and did not Christ say 'I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword'? How much he really understands or cares about Christianity may be seen from the motto from Nietzsche which, I understand, appeared on the front page of the German edition: 'War and courage have achieved more great things than the love of our neighbour. It is not your sympathy, but your bravery, which has hitherto saved the shipwrecked of existence. "What is good?" you ask. To be brave is good.'

We must therefore distinguish between the *Junker* and the thinker. The *Junker* may be reminded that, when all is said, 'the Friederician tradition' may be a very inadequate guide through the unknown ages that lie before humanity, that nations as well as men may secure immediate and striking successes by courses which, if persisted in, may lead in the long run to colossal disaster, and outlawry from the commonwealth of nations, and that One who knew what was in God as well as in man once said, 'They that take the sword shall perish by the sword.'

To do Bernhardi justice, he recognizes that something beyond the practical argument is necessary, and so we find him seeking to ground the policy of 'the incomparable Frederick', and his own convictions, in the cosmic order by the use of the argument of the 'biological necessity' of war. 'Blood and iron' are in the nature of

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things. The fundamental law of all life is the struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest for that struggle. Morality is a secondary result of that conflict, something which grows up within the separate States. It is the result of a concordat between their citizens which experience shows to be necessary if the States are to be efficient in the universal struggle and so to survive. But it has no rightful place in the relations of States with each other, because there is no Super-state to enforce it. Man, as such, has no rights. It is hard to see how, even if there were such an authority, it could enforce an international morality without suspending the struggle which, on Bernhardt's view, is the fundamental law. 'Strife', he would say with Heraclitus, 'is the father of all things,' including morality. All the virtues, on this view, become simply means to national existence and greatness, to the possession of ice-free harbours and gold mines, provinces rich in coal and iron, over-sea markets and so forth. This is plainly materialism of a very elementary kind. The strange thing is that the writer does not seem to see this, and uses idealistic, religious, and even Christian language with the most edifying fervour.

NATURE OR SPIRIT

But the fact remains that the core of his argument is that the all-determining thing in the universe is nature and not spirit, biological and not moral necessity.

Any complete answer to Bernhardt would thus demand a critical analysis of materialism, which would carry us far beyond the limits of this paper. But a theory may be refuted not only by examining its premisses and by showing its inner inconsistencies and its inadequacy to explain the facts, but also by showing that it leads to consequences so revolting to the conscience of mankind,

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and so glaringly absurd in themselves, that the theory becomes itself incredible. This service to humanity Bernhardi certainly has done.

THE THEORY IN PRACTICE

Let us see how his theory works out in its results. Within the nations men owe to one another justice, mercy, and truth, but cross the frontiers of the State and you owe nothing to any alien. He has no rights that you need recognize. The dawn is still beautiful, and the stars glorious in their courses, human life in its pathos and mystery, its laughter and its tears is the same in essence though the Rhine lies behind you ; the glory of art and song and the grandeur of science are the same. But there is one great exception. The moral law has disappeared. The alien has no rights as against you, and you have none as against him. You are now absolutely free to do what you like to him, provided you do not injure your country. You will, of course, be unwise in your own interest if you go too far. But you owe no duty to him or his country or humanity. The Rhine has made all the difference. So in foreign policy the statesman may lie without stint, break all his oaths, and use any rapacity or violence. Nay, if he hesitates to do so when his country's gain requires it, he is wronging his fellow citizens. To humanity, as such, he owes nothing at all. In fact, its interests are best conserved by each State doing the best for itself that it knows and can. This is his sole concession to the idea of a common human interest. Any conscious pursuit of such an ideal interest of all by the will of each is out of the question. He finds room for such a dream only in a foot-note. 'It belongs', he says, 'to the wide domain of Utopias.' We may answer, with a modern writer, that his own conception belongs to the wide domain of Hell.

Anything more repulsive than Bernhardi's outlook

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upon the future of the world, or the reign of suspicion, violence, and fear that would result from his principles, it would be hard to conceive. It must seem a mere madhouse to any one who has caught from Christ some glimpse of pity, magnanimity, and truth. The fundamental law is struggle. Struggle means war. Therefore war is of God. Therefore it is good. Let us grasp the nettle boldly. Strong races will accept the law, will glory in it, and will arm not only for defensive but for aggressive war. War is 'God's dreadful medicine' for human slackness and selfishness. It is a school for all the heroic virtues. The love of peace is a sign of national decay.

What are we to think of all this? We have now had rather more than three months of war. It is rarely, indeed, that any volume has had so sudden and so tremendous an illustration of its principles. We have seen how Bernhardt and his comrades of the German Staff conceive of the practice of war. We may frankly admit that they have given us an illustration of its nobler side in the courage and self-devotion that they have shown without stint for the Fatherland. If war were only a matter of enduring hardship and of laying down one's life for the fatherland, we might admit much that he says of it. The real trouble is that it is so much besides. It is not simply that you have to do all that you can to maim or slay the bodies of your antagonists and to crush their spirits; it is that you have to inflict such unimaginable misery and wrong on those who cannot resist, and who are to the combatants as nearly ten to one. Most of us are surer than ever that war is essentially a brutal thing, because of what, through these hundred days, we have heard and read. We seem to have been living in an epidemic of madness, shot through with gleams of light and reason. We have all been a little abnormal, and some of us not a little. What is it that above all has poisoned the brain and inflamed the heart?

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It has been what we have learned of the fate of the old men and women and children in time of war. We do not need to go to the innumerable accounts of unauthorized outrage here. It is quite enough to take things which no one denies, and which are understood to be approved and instigated by the militarism for which Bernhardi speaks. They are, therefore, on his own showing, part of the Divine necessity of war. A man and his wife are sitting peacefully talking together in Antwerp in the quiet of an autumn night. No formal investment or warning of bombardment has been given. A Zeppelin sails in in the darkness, drops its bomb beside them, and all that is left of them is a falling drizzle of flesh and blood. Beside them hundreds are maimed or slain. Again, in a great French city, far from the battle-field, a little girl is playing beside her nurse. A 'Dove' sails in overhead, there is a loud explosion, and what remains is a dead woman and a little wailing heap of crippled humanity. The doer of this deed, a strong and bold youth, sails away in triumph to receive military honours and the plaudits of an admiring people. Had that people been in its senses it would have hanged him, and repented in anguish and tears the deed that had stained the honour of a great nation.

But on Bernhardi's theory and presumably, seeing that he is a member of the General Staff, his practice, these acts of warfare were part of the counsel of God. He is welcome to his God. Atheism may be a much cleaner and nobler thing than religion of this type. Every human being who is not out of his senses with fear or pride knows that such things are wicked and shameful. All the sophisms about there being no morality as between nations are snapped like burnt thread in the blaze of righteous anger that springs up in every uncorrupted human conscience against such deeds done to any people under heaven. If our country is going to do such things

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and make us complicit in them, then we shall renounce our country and seek admission to some nobler State.

But it may be said, though Bernhardi cannot say it, that such things are no essential part of fair warfare. Why should they not be such, if they are effective? On his theory they are not wrong. Nothing is wrong if done in war to men, women, or children of another nation. They have no rights and no guardian. Torture, burning alive, extermination are all legitimate, if only they are effective for their further purpose of national aggrandizement. If the theory is true, we must carry it through.

Again, take espionage. No man can deny that this is an essential element in all warfare. All nations practise it. The spy is as essential an element in war as the hero in the trenches. Yet who can deny that there is something morally revolting in the conduct of one who comes to a foreign land, enters into kindly relations with its citizens, is hospitably welcomed to their homes and friendships, and who is all the time using this human trustfulness and kindness with the view of bringing on the land in which he dwells all the horrors of an alien invasion? Are ignominies like these an essential part of human life? Is any noble nation really proud of its spies any more than of its hangmen? Yet on Bernhardi's principles this is a mere foolish prejudice. Hospitality to the stranger is a criminal folly, and he who takes advantage of it is a wise and noble patriot.

MORAL LAW UNIVERSAL OR ELSE ILLUSORY

Is there any need to pursue the argument further? There is something behind all this instinctive human horror and scorn for the many moral enormities of warfare. The human conscience is clean against Bernhardi's view that as between States there is no morality. In fact, his own conscience is oddly at strife with his

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theory, for he is quite unreserved in his condemnation of other peoples for acting with treachery and violence in the international sphere. The ice becomes very thin for Bernhardi when he is speaking of the misdeeds of England towards other lands. He cannot have it both ways. Either there is a universal law of Right, or there is none at all. In fact, the whole contention is preposterous. Morality has no frontiers. That which is right on one side of the English Channel or the Rhine cannot be wrong for the same man on the other. We owe justice, mercy, and truth to all men everywhere, or we do not owe them to any man anywhere ; we do not owe them even to our own fellow countrymen. For nothing can be more certain than that if a nation acts with deceit and violence towards other nations, and if it gains success in its aims thereby, the contagion will spread through all its own people, and the whole national life will go down at last in anarchy and shame. So was it with great Rome, and so has it always been with all predatory races. In their development there always comes a time when the unreasoning and instinctive patriotic morality of their youth moves up to a higher and broader plane, or else lapses into moral disintegration and outward ruin.

Bernhardi's philosophy of war, then, leads to consequences which revolt the conscience and common sense of men, when we simply take it as it stands, without raising the deepest question of all.

BERNHARDI FORGETS GOD

But let us at last raise that supreme question. Bernhardi says that there can be no moral obligation save to those within the State, for there is nothing higher than the State. He has forgotten God. If there exist 'One whom we describe least imperfectly when we call Him Personal', we cannot but ascribe to Him the noblest

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character of Personality, Justice, Mercy, and Truth ; and if this be true of Him who is the only enduring Reality and Power, He must have something to say in this debate. The acknowledgement of God of itself at once universalizes human rights. He must deal righteously with all men, so there must be a moral order of the world ; and if there be such an order, then the whole of Bernhardi's book is a madman's dream, from which soon or late there must be an appalling awakening, an awakening to the reality of the Righteous God.

Moreover, He must have a purpose and an end towards which human history in all its myriad paths is converging, and in the service of which all men and all nations alike find their only true destiny. If God lives, then it is absolutely clear that the greatness of any nation can lie only in the manner in which it has contributed to the attainment of His purpose. ' Things are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be. Why, then, should we seek to be deceived ? ' Everything turns, therefore, on how we must conceive of that purpose and end.

Bernhardi finds the clue to that purpose in Nature. This is the radical error behind the many errors of his volume. If there be a living God, a purpose and an end in the cosmos, the real clue must be found in the climax and not in the proem. To take ' biological necessity ' as the clue to human life is to commit the same kind of error as if we took the opening scenes of *Hamlet* and endeavoured to explain the whole drama in terms of our interpretation of them. Why, we cannot fully understand them unless we go back on them from the revealing climax. So it is the faith of Christians that they alone can understand human life in all its riches who view it in the light of the Kingdom of God. They believe that the purpose of Nature is to produce a being higher than herself, the very nature of whose moral life shows

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that he belongs to a greater Order, who judges himself, whether he will or no, by standards higher than those of the brute struggle for existence, through which his soul, by long ancestral paths, has come by ideals which reveal that he is fundamentally not natural but spiritual, that he is made for the Kingdom of God. They believe that the true clue to the whole vast cosmos is found in the Cross and Resurrection of the Christ, in which is disclosed the very nature of that Kingdom. If, then, we are to think of God in terms of the Cross and the Resurrection, it is totally inconceivable that He could ever have decreed that war should be a necessary and enduring element in human life. To maintain the contrary is definitely and plainly to range oneself on the side of Anti-Christ.

IS WAR PERMANENTLY NECESSARY ?

The only possible course for a Christian, therefore, is to hold that war is always due to some aberration from the will of Almighty Love, by one or both parties to that war. Christian thought to-day, where it is coherent, takes this form.

But Christians differ as to whether war will ever be eliminated from human life. Many say that it can be abolished only when sin is destroyed, and as they believe that sin can never be destroyed they hold to the permanence of war. There is in these despairing conclusions the gravest peril lest they shall simply play into the hands of men like Bernhardt and the militarists. If you believe that any evil is inevitable, all experience shows that you have taken a long step towards making it inevitable. The ages, for instance, when men thought it impossible to win the whole world for God were not and could not be missionary ages. What was the result ? The Church simply played into the hands of the clear-headed cynical exploiters of the non-Christian races, because it did not believe enough

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in God, or in man, or in the Gospel. One consequence was the entanglement of Christendom in African slavery. So is it to-day. Trace the impotence of the Christian Churches regarding war to its roots, and it will be found to be due to the same want of faith.

There are two answers to this despairing temper. The first is radical and may be put as a question. By what right do we say that sin is a necessary and eternal element in God's world, and that the Almighty must in the end of the day accept the defeat of His Kingdom in the world that He has made? If, however, this elementary range of faith is not possible to us, and if we accept the existence of sin as an enduring element in human life, it does not by any means follow that warfare must be permanent. There is not one single great crusade for human progress that might not have been paralysed at the outset by such want of faith. The securing of world-peace may seem to be so hard as to dismay the stoutest heart, but is it any harder than was the extirpation of, say, polygamy or slavery? Yet this has been accomplished in all the progressive races of mankind. Is this cancer more radically established in the tissues of the social organism than were those? What would have become of the human race if men of the Spirit had acquiesced in these barbarous customs on the plea that so long as lust and avarice were so deeply rooted in human nature it was hopeless to attempt to remove their social expression? Doubtless both polygamy and slavery had their Bernhardis who endeavoured to consecrate their enormities as 'biological necessities', and therefore as the ordinance of God. And doubtless, too, they found their best allies in those who had so little faith in God that they despaired of their fellow men.

How are such great advances in human life won? Many forces work together to the common end. Economic factors have their own great part to play, and

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these are every day becoming stronger in the cause of peace. But history shows, also, that taken alone these can never prevail. There must be a change of heart. Men must come to feel that there is something contemptible, cheap and dreary about the ideals of the past in comparison with the new ideals that are being born. Great causes are won by the power they show of capturing the nobler and more powerful minds in the coming generation. Time and mortality do the rest. That is what is needed to-day. The leading minds and the common consciousness need to be disillusioned about war, to be made to feel that there is more than a taint of madness in it all, that there is something ignominious and brutal in its very essence.

But we need more than that if we are truly to complete our answer to militarism. There is a nobler element in it, and we must find a 'moral equivalent for war'. There is no complete 'answer to Bernhardi' until this be found. His book is not wholly base. Narrow and sordid as are his thoughts of his people's destiny, cynical and envious as are his judgements of all other nations, confused and shallow as is his philosophy, there are in his strange book gleams of nobility, too. He loves his fatherland well, if not wisely, and in her interest he preaches unremitting endurance, toil, and sacrifice. We cannot really answer him until we have met him here, and dealt with his strength as well as with his weakness. Such men are impervious to any purely economic gospel. They have an instinct that they are standing for something that all the economic demonstrations of the profitableness of peace will never satisfy.

THE ANSWER

Has the Christian Church to-day no great message to proclaim to all the nations, which will preserve all that is really noble in patriotism and in sacrifice for the

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fatherland? Is it not rather an essential if half-forgotten part of her message that there is a world-wide Kingdom of God, too great and rich for any one nation to express in its completeness, but needing them all, with all their racial differences and historical individualities, for its attainment, a real and not simply an ideal commonwealth of all mankind, slowly working out its vast destinies not in a tame cosmopolitanism, but in a true international life, rich in its very antagonisms because held together in a deeper unity in God? Many things, as the Prime Minister recently said, which seemed Utopian a year ago are not Utopian to-day, because we see now as we did not then the inevitable alternative. It has been truly said that the task of statesmanship now is to turn the Balance of Power into a Concert of Europe. The phrase marks the transition from racial separatism to a constructive and united labour for a common end. Only absorption in this end can ever supply the 'moral equivalent for war'. There is an opportunity here for Christianity that never in all its centuries it has had before of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

If the spirit of prophecy were to awaken among us again, it would preach to us not only of Doom but of Hope. It would proclaim to men that the life they have been living is hardly life at all, that the life that they may have is as much above what they are having as their life is above that of the savage, and that they are living in a world of riches, natural and human and Divine, which they have hardly begun to discover or to use. It would tell us that to win those hidden riches we need all the nations and all the races. And it will tell us too, as it has always been its mission to do, that the leader of our full human salvation is Christ, that only He can mediate between man and man who mediates between man and God.

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